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SUBJECT: IRANIAN STUDENT ACTIVIST CALLS FOR INTERNATIONAL PRESSURE ON
IRAN'S HUMAN RIGHTS

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CLASSIFIED BY: Jason L Davis, Consul General, Dubai, UAE.

REASON: 1.4 (d)

1.(S) Summary: Amir Abbas Fakhavar (please protect), an Iranian student activist and political prisoner on the run since he skipped out while on prison leave June 2005, discussed with PolEconChief his views for helping the human rights situation in Iran. End summary

2.(S) Amir Abbas Fakhavar (please protect), an Iranian student activist and former political prisoner, met with PolEconChief Dubai May 8 and 9 while applying for a US visa. His views on the political situation in Iran are reported septel.

View of International Role on Human Rights

3.(S) Fakhavar is an advocate of sustained international spotlighting of human rights cases in Iran, and says he personally experienced the benefits of the international pressure while in prison. For instance, when the human rights organization PEN publicized his case, he suddenly got better treatment. He said the only reason he and others get temporary leave from prison is because of the international pressure on Iran. He added that when the US in particular raises a case, it helps the prisoner very much. Despite the Iranian government's bluster, he maintains, Iran is frightened of the US.

4.(S) When asked about the recent arrest in Iran of Ramin Jahanbegloo, Fakhavar focused on his objection to the purported wishes of Jahanbegloo's family to keep his arrest low profile. In his opinion, a prisoner's family should not direct how vocal foreign governments are about a case, because, he says, it is not a "private" matter. For instance, he said Akbar Ganji, who he calls a friend, was on a hunger strike until his last day in prison, down to 46 kilos or half his weight when he entered prison. He told his wife to announce to the world he was continuing his hunger strike, but members of the reformist Mosharekat party convinced her not to. After Ganji left prison, he was very upset with her, and told her his case was a national matter, not a personal one. Regarding his own case, Fakhavar said he had wanted the world to know about his situation, and his family was wrong to oppose this.

Experience in Prison

5.(S) Fakhavar says he has been arrested 18 times, and was once beaten in court so badly that his knee sustained permanent damage. He spent 222 days in solitary confinement at one stretch, as well as other shorter stints. He said he reached the point of preferring abuse to complete isolation and said he

was really in "bad shape" when he was released, not wanting even his family close by.

6.(S) When UN Special Rapporteur Ambeyi Ligabo visited his prison (Evin Prison), the prison officials sent him, along with jailed human rights lawyer Nasser Zarafshan - both considered "outspoken" - to court for a "hearing," despite the fact their sentences had already been passed. After a few hours with no hearing, they were returned to prison, where they heard the UN team had come and gone. On the other hand, Fakhravar said he was able to bribe a guard to let him smuggle a cell phone into prison, which allowed him to maintain outside contacts.

7.(S) Fakhravar said he left prison in June 2005 on a five day leave to take exams and did not go back. For the past 10 months, friends helped him, hid him in cellars, and then - a few days ago - bribed airport officials not to enter his name into computers, which enabled him to leave the country. His cousin had posted a deed to property as bail; there is now an arrest warrant out against the cousin. After Fakhravar absconded, his sister was told there was a "shoot to kill" order against him. He said his sister's husband, Mehrdad Heidar Pour, is also a political prisoner in Evin prison, and has a few months left of his three year sentence. Heidar Pour and his wife were arrested in 2003 for helping organize the 2003 student demonstrations. His sister was given two years probation instead of prison because she was nursing a baby at the time.

Other Political Prisoners

8.(S) Asked for updates of other political prisoners, Fakhravar gave the following information (see the 2005 Iran human rights reports for details of their cases):

- Akbar Ganji - Fakhravar said that since his release, his network is trying to get him out of the country.

- Naser Zarafshan - recently got a two month leave.

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- Siamak Pourzand - on medical leave, under house arrest. Fakhravar said he had seen him two weeks earlier, he is very sick, and doubts he would not survive a return to prison.

- Mojtab Saminejad and Massoud Bastani - in prison in Arak.

- Abbas Amir-Entezam - on medical leave for two years.

- Abbas Deldar and Mehrdad Lohrasbi - in prison, arrested in the 1999 student demonstrations. Were picked up in random arrests, were street vendors, not students. Lohrasbi is very sick, suffering from mental problems and obesity.

- Manuchehr and Akbar Mohammadi - Manuchehr was recently returned to prison; Akbar is on leave.

- Ahmad Batebi - death sentence recently upheld, "to scare others," said Fakhravar. (Death sentence commuted to 15 years, according to press reports.)

- Amir Heshmat Saran - in prison.

- Hussein Qazian - on leave.

- Arjang Davoudi - in prison in Bandar Abbas, sentenced to 15 years. One of the founders of the student movement. With Fakhravar, founded Jonbesh-e Azadi-ye Iranian (JAI or Iranian Movement of Liberation) in 2002. Has partial loss of sight and hearing because of torture. Is held with dangerous prisoners.

- Peyman Piran - freed April 10.

- Bina Darabzand - in Evin prison.

- Abdol Fattah Soltani - recently released on a very expensive bail.

- Arash Sigarchi - now on leave, but supposed to go back to prison.

- Heshmatollah Tabarzadi - original sentence of 14 years was recently reduced to nine years, of which he has served six.

9.(S) Regarding the 2006 case of a young woman, Elham Afrotan and other journalists from the provincial weekly "Tamadone Hormozgan," arrested January 29 for insulting the supreme leader, Fakhravar said Afrotan was sentenced to two years in Evin prison. He said press reports that initially said she died in detention were incorrect; she may have attempted suicide. Another journalist from the publication, Mohsen Dorostkar, was also sentenced. Fakhravar noted there is no special ward for female political prisoners. They are held with regular female prisoners, something he called "culturally very difficult."

10.(S) Fakhravar volunteered to continue to provide updates on Iranian human rights cases.

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